DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 185 576 CS 205 494

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TITLE Coordination Problems in Graduate Programs for Two-Year College English Teachers.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 11p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (31st, Washington, DC, March 13-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Problems: Coordination; Educational Needs; *English Teacher Education; Graduate Study; Teacher Education; *Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Six problems in coordinating a graduate program for two-year college English teachers are discussed in this paper. The problems are: how to implement national guidelines for such programs, how to staff the programs, how to accommodate traditional university personnel guidelines and regulations to the nontraditional staff for the programs, how to attract preservice and inservice teachers into the programs, how to help graduates obtain suitable placement, and how to arrange for the certification of suitable programs. The paper concludes that those involved in graduate programs for two-year college English teachers need a national effort to deal with these and other issues. (FL)

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Coordination Problems in Graduate Programs for Two-Year College English Teachers

by

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(A paper presented at the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Washington, D. C., 14 March 1980.)

Without ado, and in less than twenty minutes, here are half a dozen of the problems I've seen in seven years of coordinating a graduate program for two-year college English teachers.

I. First, how do you implement (i.e., interpret and tailor) the national guidelines?

As most of you know, there are two sets of guidelines that most universities follow in planning and establishing graduate programs for two-year college English teachers:

One, The National Study of English in the Junior College: A Focus Report Published by the MLA ERIC Clearinghouse on the Teaching of English in Higher Education (New York: Modern Language Association, 1969); and

Two, "Gudelines for Junior College English Teacher Training Programs," College Composition and Communication (October 1971), pp. 303-313.

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The first of these studies, the MLA National Study, provides information about such matters as the organization and curriculum of junior college English Departments and the necessary qualifications for the junior college English instructor. However, this study does not set forth specific details about how a graduate program can be designed to prepare faculty for teaching in or administering a two-year college English department. In other words, it is not very helpful in planning a graduate curriculum or in identifying qualifications for two-year college faculty.

The second study, the CCCC "Guidelines," goes a step further than the MLA study in that it recommends general courses of action for departments inaugurating programs for two-year college English teachers. Perhaps the most utilitarian service rendered by the guidelines is an item-by-item discussion of eleven "Necessary Competencies" that graduate programs should attempt to instill in their candidates: (1) Linguistics, (2) Literature, (3) Rhetoric, (4) Teaching Skill, (5) Writing, (6) Reading, (7) Speaking, (8) Related Disciplines (e.g., sociology, anthropology, and psychology), (9) Training in Evaluating Student Work, (10) Interning, and (11) Electives (e.g., film and folklore).

However, the very helpful discussion of these eleven competencies poses a very real problem for the coordinator of a proposed graduate program. This problem is how to design a curriculum that will ensure candidates of the eleven necessary proficiencies. After all, the guidelines do not recommend courses or provide course descriptions; instead, they describe competencies, leaving the job to the program coordinator of matching certain courses to certain competencies. The eleven areas are thus open

to interpretation as to their corresponding curriculum components, and the corresponding curriculum components thus vary widely (not to put too fine a point on it) from program to program.

It was this wide diversity in implementing the competencies that the 1977 and 1978 TETYC "National Directories of Graduate Programs for Junior/Community College English Teachers" by Gregory Cowan, were intended to point up. Of the 57 programs represented in the 1978 revised directory, most reflect an awareness of the "Guidelines," as well as a conscientious attempt to provide the six most important competencies--reading, rhetoric, composition, ethnic literature, remedial instruction, and technical writing. These are the programs that would probably pass a national accreditation study if an accrediting agency were to evaluate the programs.

However, the small remainder of the programs are the ones with the real awareness problems and implementation problems; and it is this small group of programs that promise what they cannot deliver, that exist for the ulterior purposes of bolstering enrollments and securing appropriations, and that point up most vividly the need for regulation from an appropriate agency or commission. With a perfectly straight face, for example, the coordinator of one of these programs can claim that her program "is particularly attractive to junior/community college English teachers" in that it provides a concentration in Fine Arts, Literature, and Music . . ." (Cowan, p. 199). Hence, for the young teacher seeking to qualify for teaching technical writing, business writing, remedial composition,

developmental reading, or ethnic literature, this program offers a course entitled "'The Romantic Imagination,' [which] includes the English Romantic poets and selected English painters (Constable and Turner) and composers (Berlioz and Beethoven)" (Cowan p. 174). This is what I mean when I say there's a very real problem in implementing the national guidelines. It's a problem the profession needs to regulate.

II. A second problem I've encountered is: How to Staff the Programs?

Generally, the competencies called for by the "Guidelines" can best be imparted by specialists typically found in University departments--linguistics by applied or descriptive linguists; literature by professors of traditional literary periods or of ethnic or folk literature; reading by reading specialists; and related disciplines by professors of sociology, anthropology, or psychology. Only rarely will you find a veteran community college faculty member who has the depth of knowledge in any one of these fields adequate for teaching a term-length graduate-level course. Hence, the only option is to have several professors with purely university backgrounds and orientations to teach key courses in the graduate program for two-year college English teachers.

The problem here, of course, is that veteran university professors rarely accommodate their classes to the practical needs of the two-year college faculty. Thus, for one half the semester the linguist belabors all the fine nuances of the great vowel shift, while the community college teacher in his course wonders how such erudition can be applied in the learning lab. In a similar vein, the professor of medieval literature

drones on and on about the narrative genres in The Canterbury Tales, while the two-year teacher wonders how to help poor Johnny comprehend an article on the sports page of the student newspaper. In short, traditional ivory--tower university professors often stir ill will among the innovative utility--minded students enrolled in the community college English program. And the problem is especially severe when the student has had several years of experience teaching in a two-year compus; in many cases, I've seen such students drop the course in disgust after the first or second meeting.

Fortunatley, several of the competencies can best be provided by veteran two-year college faculty. These competencies include, but are not limited to, Teaching Skill, Writing, Speaking, and Evaluating Student Work. The problem here is that, unless the faculty members recruited from the two-year campus are periodically rotated, then soon the two-year faculty members lose their community college orientation and become ordinary university professors. One vital sign in any study of a graduate program is thus the number of faculty who are also currently teaching at a nearby two-year campus.

III. A third problem is how to accommodate traditional university personnel guidelines and regulations to the non-traditional staff for the programs.

In many public universities, such as the sixteen in the University of North Carolina, new tenure-track appointments with professorial rank are virtually limited to faculty with terminal degrees in academic disciplines. Moreover, if a faculty member of professorial rank at one university is

recruited by another university, then consideration is given to her old rank. Only rarely, for instance, would an Associate Professor change jobs to become an Assistant Professor; the recruiting department chair would think twice before even broaching such an offer.

The problems with hiring veteran faculty from two-year schools to teach full-time in a university program are therefore obvious. Since many two-year faculty do not have terminal degrees, the hiring regulations have to be abandoned temporarily for the purpose of recruitment. Such special consideration wreaks havoc, of course, on subsequent enforcement of the regulations; but what is of greater consequence to the newly hired veteran from the community college is that her new university colleagues resent her special hiring treatment, as well as her atypical credentials. Moreover, since many community college faculties have no ranks, teachers recruited for a university program are sometimes hired at a lower rank than their years of experience would ordinarily justify. And often even those two-year teachers with full professorships or headships are not hired at comparable levels in the university.

Finally, there is the problem of tenure. Is a community college faculty member who is hired for his teaching experience and classroom excellence expected to grind out the articles, talks, and books that are called for in university tenure requirements? Is he supposed to compete as a research-scholar against his colleagues with research degrees? Since university tenure criteria are often inflexible, the new faculty member can expect to find that no exceptions will be made in his case. The result: tenure denied--and the need to seek a new job.

Obviously, then, if our university graduate programs are expected to recruit community college faculties, personnel requirements for hiring, ranking, and tenuring ought to be adjusted to accommodate the sometimes atypical credentials. Otherwise, the "Guidelines" that call for the employment of such teachers are potentially damaging to members of the very profession the "Guidelines" are intended to benefit.

IV. The fourth problem is how to attract preservice and inservice teachers into the programs.

This problem involves two groups of students: first, preservice community college faculty who are trying to decide whether to continue their studies in literature and language, and having to choose between a traditional literary graduate program or an innovative rhetoric graduate program for two-year college English teachers; and second, inservice community college faculty who want to improve their expertise, upgrade their credentials, or gear up for an accreditation study, or who simply want to return to school for the fellowship and R and R.

The coordinator's problem with the first group, the preservice students, is that standard English Department prejudices and antagonistic colleagues can portray the two-year college graudate program as second drawer when compared to the purely literary program. The result is that many fine graduate students shun the two-year program and opt for the literature track.

At East Carolina, notwithstanding these compelling forces, we have been successful in attracting many of the best graduate students into our

program--and with perfectly good reasons. Because of time limitations, I will mention rather than describe them, but will be happy to elaborate on them later. They are:

(1) by pointing up, through slide shows and through graduate student visits to nearby two-year college campuses, the pleasant laid-back atmosphere of the community college grounds and classrooms;

(2) by calling attention to the challenging, noble mission of working with the non-traditional students in community colleges; and

(3) by emphasizing the greater likelihood of employment for our graduates than for the literature track graduates;

As for the inservice teachers, our most appealing features are classes that meet only one time per week for three hours on one night; a total curriculum that can be completed by a full-time two-year college teacher in one to two academic years; a curriculum taught wholly in the English Department; the availability of teaching fellowships; the substitution of a special project in place of the internship for veteran teachers; and the absence in our program of such traditional (and often non-utilitarian) features as a final thesis or dissertation.

V. How to help program graduates obtain suitable placement.

The problem here is represented ironically by a recent article entitled "Staffing in the Two-Year College" that appeared in Profession '79, a selection of articles from the Bulletins of the Association of Departments of English (MLA: 1979,, 29-38; by Carol [redacted] Cloos). In this article, an

obviously intelligent and well read community college chair devotes eight pages to explaining her department's preferences in hiring new faculty. Yet, while sharing her impressions with her colleagues across the country, she merely gives a passing nod to the special graduate programs designed to serve her profession, passing them off with a flippant "I am not sufficiently familiar with any of . . . [them] to be able to endorse them wholeheartedly" (p. 31). Suggesting that her department is representative, but that it is almost indistinguishable from a four-year college department in both curriculum and student ability, the article goes on to suggest that a traditional masters in English with a thesis proving the person can write well, or better yet a recent Ph. D., makes the best teacher (p. 30).

This attitude, which fosters the notion that there is little or no difference between the community college and university student or between the two-year and four-year faculty, is perhaps the chief source of grief for those of us in two-year programs. Not that we have trouble placing our graduates; on the contrary, our trouble is keeping students unemployed long enough for them to complete our programs. But for so many two-year department chairs not to favor the graduates of our programs points up a widespread lack of professional awareness. This unawareness is in turn a detriment to the building of appropriately trained faculty and thus of some of the problems between teachers and students.

Hence, as a solution to this problem, I suggest that professional societies such as CCCC, NCTE, and ADE make an effort to educate department chairs

about the "Guidelines" and the various graduate programs. Only by supporting the programs thusly can these professional associations show their commitment to the very guidelines they devised.

VI. The sixth and last problem is how to arrange for the certification of suitable programs.

As these problems suggest, those of us involved in graduate programs for community college English teachers continue to need a national effort to resolve a number of troublesome issues. We need a strong board or agency to complete the work that has not progressed since the "Guidelines" were published almost a decade ago. We need for that board to offer guidance about staffing the university graduate programs with teachers from the two-year college ranks and about how these people can be assimilated into the community of researchers and scholars. We can use additional assistance in attracting the very best graduate students into the community college curriculum and teaching profession. We require help with awakening our veteran colleagues to the academic and professional accommodations afforded them by the MLA Study, by the CCCC "Guidelines," by the many special grauate programs, and by the specially trained graduates of these programs. Finally, we need the invigorating scrutiny that an accreditation agency would bring to our programs, a scrutiny that would publicly discriminate between the fit and--dare I say it?--the unfit or counterfeit.